

## KINGDOM OF COMMUNITY

6<sup>th</sup> July 2025

(4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)

### READING<sup>1</sup>

#### **Luke 10:1-11, 17-20**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*

*Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.*

*Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.'*

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<sup>1</sup> New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition of the Bible.

*The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. Indeed, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

**REFLECTION** (Rev. Toby Keva)

I stopped attending church regularly not long after my dad passed away, roughly before the start of year 1. So, from the start of primary school to the middle of high school, I was practically 'churchless'. Like many today, our family only went to church on Easter and Christmas days.

Things changed when my friends in year 10 started inviting me to join the youth group in my church. Then, I gradually being reintroduced back to the church community that I had left for almost a decade. I felt welcomed and valued by the people in the church. I remember telling myself that I had finally returned 'home'.

Friends, I would never be here without the relationships that I rediscovered in my church back in Indonesia. It was through their friendships that the seeds of faith, which my late Father planted in me, grew.

Indeed, the Kingdom of God that Jesus proclaims is deeply relational. It is never intended to be a private affair. From the very beginning, the Kingdom of God was, is, and will always be a communal affair.

We can see this in our reading from the Gospel of Luke. Here, Jesus sends the 72 disciples not individually, but in pairs. While Jesus never says the reason why, I think he sends his disciples as pairs to reflect the fundamental character of God's Kingdom that the disciples represent.

Matthew's Gospel tells us that Jesus once says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them (Matthew 18:20 NRSVU)." Jesus is present not in a vacuum, but in a relationship between people. That is why the disciples are sent in pairs because, only within a relationship, that the presence of Christ can be truly experienced.

Jesus also asks his disciples to practise radical dependence on other people's generosity. Controversially, Jesus asks his disciples not to be self-sufficient. This sounds quite counter cultural, especially here in the West where we value personal independence and resourcefulness. But by practising a radical dependence on other people's generosity, the disciples learn that the Kingdom of God does not depend on their resourcefulness or ingenuity.

Friends, it takes a great deal of humility to accept help from someone else. To be a recipient of someone's generosity, we have to first acknowledge our own vulnerability and need for help. Someone who is arrogant or excessively proud will never be able to genuinely receive other people's help.

As such, no one can claim that he or she is *solely* responsible for the growth of the Kingdom of God amongst the people. The Kingdom of God will always be a communal project; a project not only by those who *deliver* the message, but also by those who *hear* the message; a project not only of those who *give*, but also of those who *receive*.

The Kingdom of God is not a 'one-way', but a 'two-way street'; it is reciprocal.

So the growth of God's Kingdom is highly dependent on the receptiveness of those who hear the message. Jesus is quite consistent in this matter. Once, he calls those who are receptive to the gospel as 'good soil' where the seeds of the gospel will take root and grow into strong plants.<sup>2</sup> In other time, Jesus even warns about sharing the gospel to those who will not appreciate it. He says, "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you. (Matthew 7:6 NRSVU)"

So, the welcome must come *freely* from those who hear and receive the message of God's Kingdom; the hospitality shall not be the results of a *coercive* act. This is another key point in the Kingdom of God the Jesus paints: we cannot force the growth of God's Kingdom in our or other people's life. The seeds of God's Kingdom must be received and grow freely, free from coercion.

Arthur C. Brooks, the Harvard Professor who has written popular books about well-being, once shares a story about his wife. She was raised in an ultra-secular community in Barcelona, Spain. When they got married, she had only attended a church service a few times in her lifetime. She was actually quite hostile to all kinds of religions.

Arthur, on the other hand, grew up in a devout Christian family. Faith has always played a big role in his life.

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<sup>2</sup> "But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." (Matthew 17:23 NRSV)

For years, this disparity between his faith and his non-believing wife became a source of pain for him. It was especially hard whenever he and their children went to church, but his wife stayed home and even slept in. For years, Arthur gave up the idea that his wife would ever come to faith.

He was proven wrong, however. One day, almost out of nowhere, an interest in spirituality grew in her. Slowly, but surely, her faith developed as she studied her rediscovered faith until it became the center of her life. In the end, she becomes the more religiously attuned person that Arthur himself.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, no one can force the growth of God's Kingdom in another person's life. Within the right people, the seeds of God's Kingdom will grow regardless of us.

These are the fundamental characteristics of God's Kingdom that we can learn from our reading today. When we abide by these principles; when we allow ourselves and others to enter freely, without coercion, into a committed relationship with God and with one another; when we acknowledge our dependence not on our own ingenuity or resourcefulness, but on one another; when we learn not only to give, but also to humbly receive; when we do all these things, then true healing will take place, not only in our individual life, but also in our life as a community.

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<sup>3</sup> From Brooks, Arthur C., *From Strength to Strength: Finding Success, Happiness and Deep Purpose in the Second Half of Life* (Bloomsbury).

Indeed, when we live up to these ideals, then the power of evil that enslaves and imprisons all kinds of people in captivity, will lose its grip over us and over our world. When the seventy-two disciples, whom Jesus sends to proclaim the Kingdom, return, they enthusiastically proclaim, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us (Luke 10:17 NRSVU)!" Jesus responds to the proclamation by proclaiming, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning (Luke 10:18 NRSVU)." When we live up to the values of God's Kingdom that Jesus proclaims, evil will no longer hold power over us or over the world around us.

Once again, friends, the Kingdom of God is not about a person; it is about a *community* of people who strive to live according to the principles that Jesus teaches. It is only with and within this community that we can confidently proclaim, with the 72 disciples of Jesus, that the Kingdom of God has drawn near!

Amen.